WHIRRAKEE

December 2007 Vol. 28 No. 11

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
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Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The invited speaker at general meetings starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper.
If a workshop is held prior to the meeting, it will be advertised and it usually starts at 7.00pm.
The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 7:30pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Bob Ruddick, Rod Orr, Jan Orr, Peter Ellis, Ben Goonan, Anthony Sheean, Rob Moors

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. In addition to local excursions, campouts are held several times each year, usually coinciding with long weekends or holiday periods.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one active group that meets regularly (the Fauna Study Group) and other groups that meet at irregular intervals.

Fauna Study Group: meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building.
Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)

Bird Observers Group: This group has field excursions and the occasional lecture evening. Please consult the *Whirrakee* for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5449 3479.
To propose meetings or excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

Front cover photo?...see page 2.

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club

Vol. 28, No. 11, December 2007

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's Note
This is the last Whirrakee for a while, as there is no edition in January. There is also no general meeting in January, however, the mammal group is putting on an excursion (see page 3). Hopefully, by January, there is much to tell of holiday and backyard adventures and all submissions are welcome (up to the end of January, if they are to go into the first Whirrakee of the year). Don't forget our Christmas dinner, and the earlier-than-usual start to the meeting. Have a wonderful holiday break with all your loved ones.

Front Page Illustration – Photographer: Kerrie Norris
'The pleasures of nature' was Kerrie's title given to this photograph, and it shows some of the younger faces of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club. This photo was taken during the Blackwood excursion in July this year. It would be good to have a whole series of such people photographs. We began last month with Jack Ipsen's photo… has anybody got a continuation for February?

Excursions and Short Notices

Please note that in the excursion calendar published at the start of the year, there was no plan for a December excursion.
For any comments or questions about excursions or suggestions for 2008, ring Richard Goonan on 0423418815 or e-mail richardgoonan@optusnet.com.au

The **Fauna Group** has planned an outing in January:

Wednesday 23rd January This will be a social gathering to enjoy the sounds of the night and talk about topics of common interest. With luck, it might even rain to bring joy to the local frogs and wildlife. All field naturalists and friends are welcome.
Where: Kangaroo Flat Botanical Garden (BBQ pavilion) Camp St. Kangaroo Flat
When: 6.30 pm onwards
Bring: Picnic tea, BBQ tea or 'take-aways', mug and thermos (and maybe a plate of goodies) to share supper together (tea, coffee, milk etc. provided). Be prepared for the vagaries of weather and biting insects

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Adopt-a-Highway Relaunch

A few years ago the club was involved in Vic Roads 'Adopt-a-Highway' at Huntly on the Midland Hwy.

The scheme fell into disuse, but has been relaunched by 'Keep Australia Beautiful' Victoria, in partnership with VicRoads.
The focus has been widened from litter removal to include controlling weeds, planting trees & shrubs, dealing with soil erosion and landscaping town entrances or rest areas.

The scheme is more formal now, and involves a certain amount of paperwork and record keeping. If any member wishes to become involved, Anne Bridley has a copy of the Guidelines for Applicants and Volunteers.

HAVE YOU PAID YOUR MEMBERSHIP FOR 07/08?

If you have a red sticker on your *Whirrakee* wrapper, this is a notice that your subscription is due. You will receive further *Whirrakees* when your subscription has been paid. Please disregard this notice if you have already paid.

In this context, the owner of this un-named cheque still hasn't been located…

Cheque without a name…
Someone has sent a bank cheque paying for their 2008 membership but has neglected to provide their name and address. The cheque was a Bendigo Bank cheque for $28.50. If that might be yours, please get in touch with Stuart Fraser, our treasurer.

Field Naturalist Activities for Parents and their Children

Author: Rod Orr

Last month I wrote the following, which produced very little response, so, I've repeated it, hoping that it will be read and will lead to a much more positive reaction this time around.

>>>

children of school age and from enough Club members to provide suitable activities.

How much interest is there from parents for their children to become involved in Junior Field Naturalists activities and excursions, and, as a club member, would you be interested in helping to conduct a suitable activity which helps children learn about the environment?
If you have children, or friends with children who would like to be involved, or, if you have suggestions for activities which you could help to run, please let the Committee know during or before the November General meeting so that we can decide on a few essential rules and develop a program.
>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>

Only two members have responded during the last month - nowhere near enough for us to begin to establish such a group for families who wish to be involved with their children in Field Naturalist activities.

What does this mean? No parents at all have spoken to Committee members about their wish to involve their children in such activities! Obviously, we need a list of names of parents and their children before we can determine the level of interest!

Is there really no demand at all? Are we wasting our time on this?

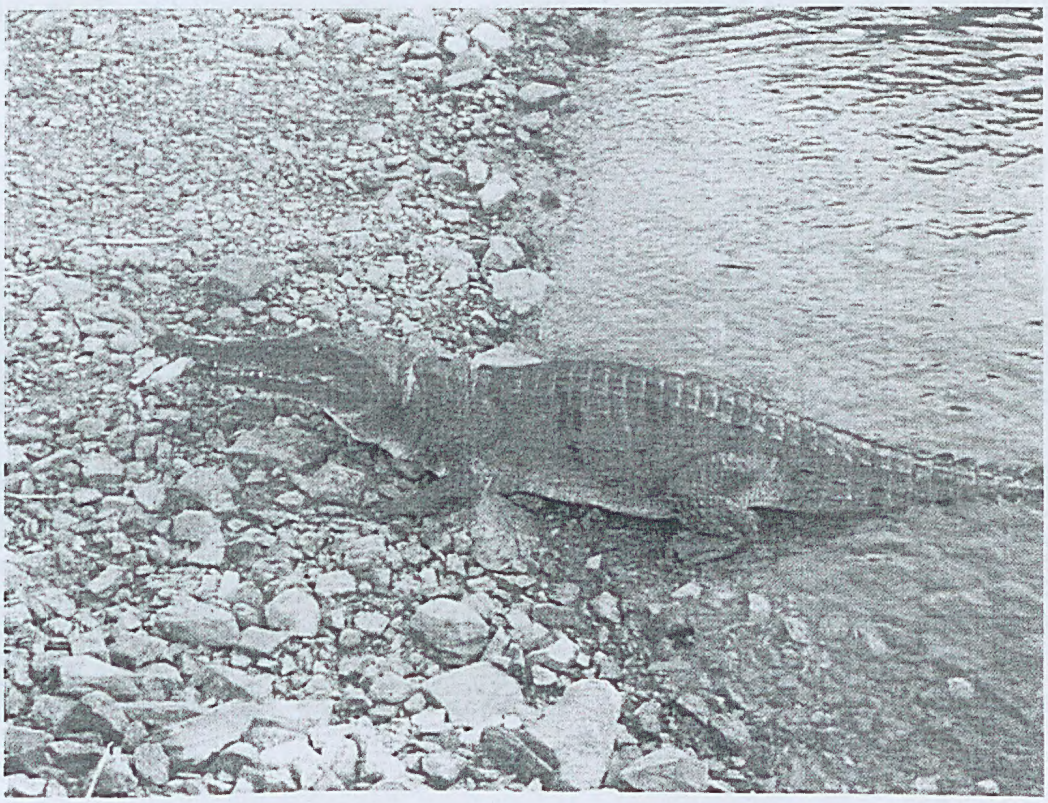
Without sufficient demand and enough offers of support, we would have to conclude that there really isn't sufficient interest.

At the last Committee Meeting we decided to run our 'Advertisement' again this month hoping (hopeless optimists?) for a more positive response.

We really do need you to read this and respond if you want the Committee to help organise activities for children of current or prospective members.

Things people see... Photographer: Wendy Scurr

Friends of Clive Fisher sent this photo of a Johnston's crocodile from their holidays in northern WA at Lake Argyle on the Ord River, with the following comment:



Fish are scarce in northern WA at the moment. Would have better in my pan than in that croc's mouth. This croc seemed to have a smile on his face as he wrestled the fish from the fishing line. Unfortunately you cannot see the line in the fishy's mouth...

"To disturb or not to disturb, that is the question ...."

Author and Photographer: Karen Thomas

We were very pleased to see our grey shrike thrush parents set up "shop" in their nest, built last year behind the air conditioning unit attached to our house.

Once more we were entertained with their beautiful calls and constant attention to their eggs and then babies...only two this year. Any crumbs left on the outside table were diligently cleaned up by them... bad luck ravens !!!! ...cheese, bread, cake.... even the dog food. Neither parent was deterred by our presence.... their nest was only a couple of metres from the clothes line.

Last year I had accidentally disturbed their 3 fledglings from the nest *(so I thought)* but was successfully able to return them to the safety behind the air conditioner;
So, I presumed *(incorrectly as it turned out)* that one of the babies squawking at the base of a red gum 20 metres away may have been startled by my activities at the clothes line. As I returned it to its sibling in the nest, the thought occurred to me that perhaps, I should leave nature well alone... a principle firmly entrenched in me as an ethology student years ago.

Soon, five minutes, perhaps ten, its squawking extracted me from within the house to find it in the herb garden a few metres from the nest ... no parent to be found and only the incessant calls between siblings to be heard... I was sure a raven would be there soon for breakfast.

Eventually one parent did return and began its call from afar..... '*little one*' started its journey ...on foot ... in the same direction that I had supposedly rescued it from. It continued on foot towards our resident White Winged Chough family foraging near the banks of Sheepwash Creek 50 metres away.

A fracas soon broke out between three choughs, the fledgling and its parent ...oh dear...to disturb or not ...this was the question put to me again.... Well, when the rest of the eight choughs joined in, and it appeared that it was a losing battle for mamma thrush ....I couldn't, not help ... '*little one*' had made it this far.... it didn't seem fair not to intervene, just a little, and distract the choughs.

An hour later after returning to the house, I could still hear it and parent calling to each other, as well as the baby left in nest. I was curious to know how far it had gone... and found it on the ground, still chirping, 200 metres away on the creek's bank with mum or dad nearby.

For the rest of the day I could not help but be reminded of the remaining baby by its constant call from the nest and was concerned that the parent had only returned once. It was only at the end of the day, when I realised I could no longer hear it, that I checked to find it had died.

A few weeks later, whilst walking along Sheepwash Creek near where I had last viewed '*little one*', I startled a young Grey Shrike Thrush from a rock shelf. It was now half as big again and could fly. Two adults were madly calling from nearby.....I am sure this was '*little one*' ....

Well I 'd liked to think so anyway!

And more from Karen's camera…

I have just taken this shot while walking along Sheepwash Creek. This yellow robin's nest was beautifully nestled in the crevice of a ribbon of bark precariously hanging from the river red

November General Meeting
Speaker: Chris McGrath
Weed alert and the weed spotter process

By Chris McGrath/Sabine Wilkens

This talk was delivered by Chris McGrath, Weed Alert Officer and North Central Pest Management Officer at DPI (Kerang). Unfortunately, I was absent for the talk, but Chris has very generously made available the power point slides he presented, and I have written it up from these (with Chris' help and approval).

If anybody is talking about weeds, a definition is always important, as the word conjures up different images in different people. The broadest definition is perhaps, that weeds are plants that 'occur where they are not wanted'.
They can have various negative effects, on agriculture, on native bushland or the physical and social health of humans and other animals and they can create access problems and become fire hazards. A weed also costs money, either in dealing with its consequences, or in trying to prevent and control it.
The earlier a weed and its potential for damage is recognised, the fewer problems it causes. This is where the Weed Alert Program comes in.

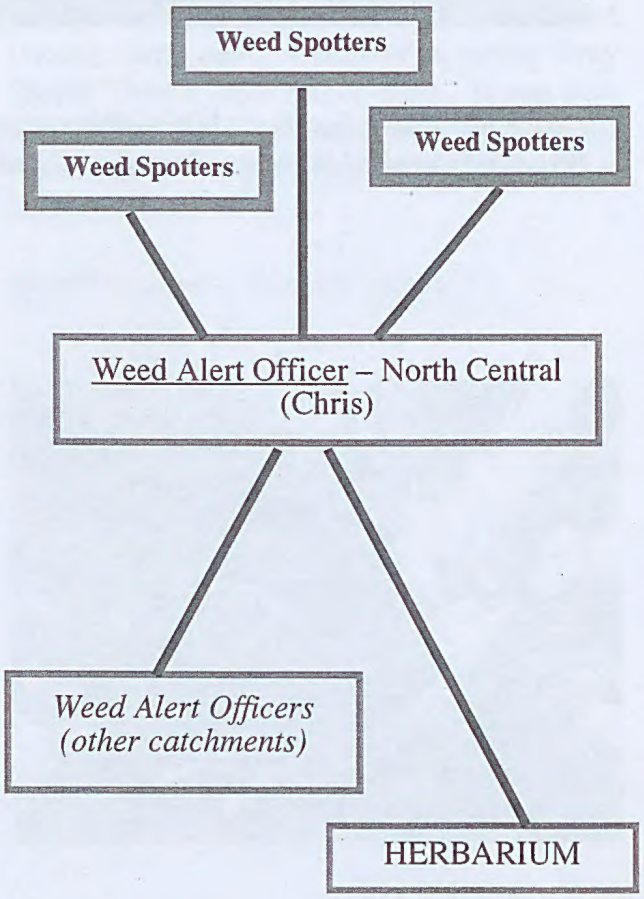
The Weed Alert Program
This is a DPI run program and it targets 'new and emerging weeds'.
There are ten Weed Alert Contact Officers distributed over the catchments of Victoria, and Chris is one of them (responsible for the North Central catchment area).
Their duties include
1) Treat State Prohibited Weeds (SPW's)
2) Follow up potential noxious weed reports for Vic Alert Weeds (VAW's)
3) Education and promotion, to increase public awareness
4) Provide a link between the Herbarium and Weed Spotters
5) Complete nursery inspections.

The program's priorities are State Prohibited Weeds (SPW's) and Vic Alert Weeds (VAW's), **not** common weeds such as Blackberry, Serrated Tussock or Paterson's Curse.

What are State Prohibited Weeds?
These are declared Noxious Weeds under the *Catchment & Land Protection Act* 1994
They are illegal to buy, sell, possess for sale, deposit onto land, bring into or transport around Victoria.

What are Victorian Alert Weeds?
These are potential weeds of the future but they are not declared in Victoria at present.
Over 400 species have been identified and Weed Risk Assessments for these are undertaken in the form of the Noxious Weed Review.

The role of a weed spotter
The program relies heavily on its weed spotters, who communicate with people like Chris about what they see, through a defined weed reporting process.



This **Weed Reporting Process** begins with the Weed Spotter spotting a plant that could be a new weed. This could be anywhere, in natural or farming areas, on roadsides, urban areas, cemeteries, waste dumps, gardens and nurseries or water ways, or even in the media. The spotter keeps good records and sends notes and possibly a specimen to the relevant Weed Alert Officer, who sends the specimen to the herbarium if it proves to be a 'Weed Alert Species'. He or she also provides feedback at this stage to the weed spotter, for example on the identity of the plant, if known or if the infestation has already been reported.

The feedback from the herbarium will either declare it as a target weed or otherwise, and this information is then also fed back to the weed spotter. If it is a new target weed, a weed risk assessment may be conducted by the DPI and a decision whether to declare this species, monitor the site and/or to take steps in eradicating it will be made. Both weed alert officer and weed spotter will be informed, if that is the case, and the weed spotter may be asked to provide more information on the extent of the species in the area.

So, **the role of the weed spotter** is critical in this program. Weed spotters get supported by their weed alert officers, as well as by special training and reference materials, to help them in their job.
When reporting a weed, weed spotters have report sheets to fill out that contain details like date, location, plant characteristics, size of infestation and possible source. Such sheets may be supported with photos and maps.
If you are interested in this process/program, information as to how to become a weed spotter is given below.

Why focus on prevention?
One good example, where prevention is practised, is Mexican Feather Grass, *Nassella tenuissima*, a State Prohibited Weed. This species has a high rate of seed production + stock + fodder movement + winds... , all of which add up to ...fast invasion and massive costs to eradicate it.

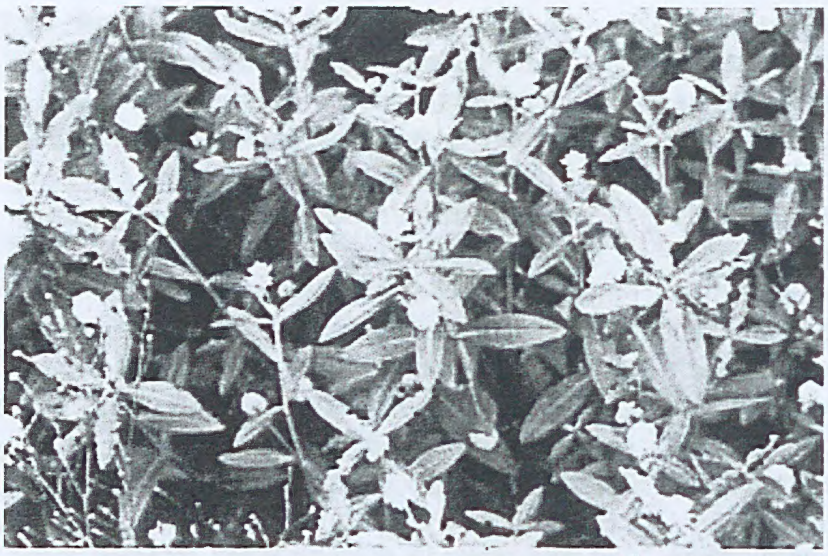
Chris had brought with him a moving display of State Prohibited and Vic Alert weeds. These included:
Horsetail (*Equisetum* species)
Orange Hawkweed (*Hieracium auratiacum*)
Mouse Ear (*Hieracium pilosella*)
Bridal Creeper (*Asparagus asparagoides*)
Gazania (*G. linearis*, *G. rigens*)
Salvinia (*Salvinia molesta*)
Water Hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*)
Alligator weed (*Alternanthera philoxeroides*)
(see photo and information below)
Karoo Thorn (*Acacia karroo*)

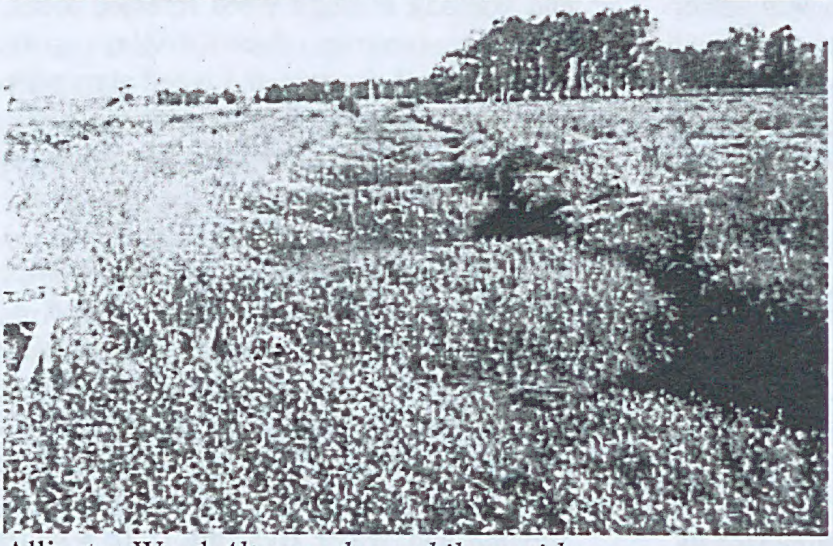
A note of caution: When dealing with weeds and walking through weed infested areas, as well as carrying dried display material around, weed spotters and weed alert officers have to be aware of not making a problem worse or creating a new one, by causing new infestations.

Nursery inspections for State Prohibited Weeds are an additional job of Weed Alert Officers. These occur throughout all ten catchments in Victoria and they involve inspection and seizure (if required) of State Prohibited Weeds. One example of such actions was the seizure, earlier this year, of *Salvinia* and Water Hyacinth from a Nursery in Gippsland. Such plants are either incinerated on DPI premises or used in educational displays.

How to become a weed spotter
On the night of the talk, Chris had a clip board, ready for people to sign up, but just because you missed the talk or you did not decide on the night, you can still become a weed spotter. It's Free!!.
Contact the DPI Customer Service Centre on 136 186 or e-mail
customer.service@dpi.vic.gov.au
For more information contact
www.dpi.vic.gov.au/weeds.

I am very glad to have had the chance to write up this talk, and I am grateful to Chris for making it possible to summarise a talk I haven't attended.
I think I should become a weed spotter too...





Alligator Weed *Alternanthera philoxeroides*

Alligator Weed is an example of a State Prohibited Weed in the North Central. In the past, alligator weed has been recorded in the Bendigo Creek. As this is a State Prohibited Weed, the Department of Primary Industries is responsible for the treatment and eradication of this Declared Noxious Weed. Over the past 5 years, all known infestations have been treated and the monitoring process still continues every season, to ensure the plant has been eradicated.

Alligator Weed is native to South America and can grow either as a floating mass, semi-submerged or on creek and channel banks. It is spread mainly by fragmentation, and flowers in mid-Summer to Autumn. If anyone has seen a plant like this in or near local waterways, please contact Chris McGrath on 0417 593 250.

Biodiversity Quiz

The biodiversity quiz **from the e-bulletin of 'Victoria Naturally' (September 07)**, was included in the October *Whirrakee*. There was no room for the answers in the November edition, so here they are. I am sure you all knew them anyway…

Q1: Victoria's Bass Strait is home to one of Australia's three largest feeding concentrations of which turtle, the Leatherback, the Leathery Turtle or the Trunkback?

A1: All three answers are correct. The Leathery Turtle, also known as the Leatherback, Luth or Trunkback is the largest of the turtle species living in marine waters, with adults growing to between 1.2 and 1.7 metres. Worldwide it has been listed as 'critically endangered' and in Victoria is listed as a threatened species.

Read more: Download the Action Statement for this species:
http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/CA256F310024B628/0/5F84405C665341E9CA2572890011A5B0/$File/leathery+turtle+2006.pdf

Q2: Which deadly pathogen is devastating grass trees throughout Victoria - is it the ebola virus, armillaria root rot or phytopthera?

A2: *Phytopthera cinnamomi* is a root disease present in many of Victoria's national parks, including the Brisbane Ranges, where it is having a devastating impact on plant life including the area's iconic grass trees.

Read more: Find out how the VNPA's NatureWatch program is actively helping to manage this problem.

Q3: Can you name one of the two monotremes (egg-laying mammals) found around Melbourne?

A3: Around Melbourne we have the rare privilege of living with two of the three known egg-laying mammals, the Platypus and the Short-beaked Echidna. Platypuses live in tributaries of the Yarra River and in the Barwon River. Short-beaked Echidnas can be seen trundling along roadsides and bush tracks in north-eastern Melbourne and the Mornington Peninsula.

Q4: Seagrass meadows cover the seafloor in many of Victoria's bays and inlets. Are they classified as a seaweed (macroalgae) or are they true flowering plants (angiosperms)?

A4: Believe it or not Seagrasses are true flowering plants. Their ancestors made the move from the land to the sea early in the development of flowering plants. Although there are only seven seagrass species in Victoria they support a diverse marine community and contribute greatly to life in our coastal areas.

Q5: Also known as the Bush Thick-knee, some Indigenous peoples link this bird to ghosts because of its eerie call. Is it the Bush-Stone Curlew, Stubble Quail or the Grey-Crowned Babbler?

A5: It's the Bush Stone-Curlew, which is more often detected by its loud wailing 'weerloo' calls heard at night, than it is by sighting them. Bush Stone-Curlews were formerly widespread and common throughout northern, western and central Victoria but their range has declined markedly in the past 100 years and they are listed as a threatened species under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988.

Read more: Download the Action Statement for this species:
http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/CA256F310024B628/0/D2FFEBC904CEB1A5CA2570EC00829C3D/$File/078+Bush+Stone-curlew+1997a.pdf

Diary

The General, Bird Observers Group and Fauna Study Group meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

General Meetings

Wednesday, December 12 6.30pm
Please note the earlier starting time to allow for the annual Christmas dinner. Bring a plate of sweets or savouries as well as your own drinks, cutlery etc.
With all of that festive cheer, Rob Watkins will give us an audio-visual presentation about the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club's history.

Please note: There is no general meeting in January

Wednesday, February 13 7.30pm
In this first meeting of the year, members usually bring interesting slides to share (not necessarily of their holidays)

Excursions
Contact Richard Goonan if you have any comments, questions or ideas for excursions in 2008 (ph 0423418815).

Fauna Group
This group meets (in the clubrooms) on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm.

The **Fauna Group** will have an outdoor meeting in January:
Wednesday 23rd January Social gathering to enjoy the sounds of the night and talk about topics of common interest. With luck, it might even rain to bring joy to the local frogs and wildlife. All Field Naturalists and friends are welcome.

Where: Kangaroo Flat Botanical Garden (BBQ pavilion) Camp St. Kangaroo Flat
When: 6.30 pm onwards
Bring: Picnic tea, BBQ tea or 'take-aways', mug and thermos (and maybe a plate of goodies) to share supper together (tea, coffee, milk etc. provided). Be prepared for the vagaries of weather and biting insects

Regular Fauna Excursions
Every Friday morning starting at around 9 to 9:30, the Fauna Group inspects nest boxes in the Spring Gully area. The excursions are led by Maurie Lewis, 16 Vains St. Golden Square. Phone 0407 427 179 or 5442 1813. Phone Maurie to confirm exact departure times and location. If you don't phone but go directly to Maurie's house and find nobody at the house between 9 and 9:30 then the excursion is not on.

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.
W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

SEANA Autumn campout 7 - 10 Mar 2008 Naracoorte Caves NP – 1st Notice
Attractions include Caves, rare fossils, viewing southern bent-winged bat wintering colony plus botany, bird and geology tours.
Registration and deposit of $30 to be paid by 20 September.
Total cost probably under $125 includes 3 catered dinners & caves guides.

Australian Naturalists Network (ANN) Get-together 10-18 May 2008
Mary River Park, Northern Territory.
Expression of interest & deposit of $200 was due to NTFNC by 1/10/07.
Accommodation at Mary River Park was to be booked directly by end of October 07.
The **second notice** has been received. This includes an update on accommodation availability at Mary River Park (cabins are essentially full) plus lists of tour operators and natural history references.

Anne Bridley (54493479) has further details